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Composing Digital Media

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Reflection on GIMP

I consider myself to be well-versed in technology. I know how to navigate Word, Excel, and Power Point, and I can engage with readers on social media. Due to the fact that I am an English major I shouldn’t concern myself with learning about computer programs, especially since I don’t plan on working with graphics in my future field.

At least, this is what I had believed before this past summer.

In May, I was hired as to intern at a public relations and branding firm in Pittsburgh. The company stressed the importance of connecting with customers about a product or event through social media posts, press releases, and blogs. I had originally assumed that I would be editing and writing documents for businesses, but instead I was assigned to enhance companies’ websites. I still did a lot of writing, but I discovered that even in a company that focuses on communicating with people, words are not always essential. In fact, my coworkers who were more familiar with graphic design were wanted by more clients and received more commission. I felt overwhelmed. I needed to advance myself further in the world of web design if I wanted to be successful after graduation.

Which is why I decided to sign up for Composing Digital Media. Before this class, I had little to no photo editing abilities and, admittedly, when we were first allocated the task of creating a visual on GIMP I was worried. However, after creating a clear image in my mind of the event I wanted to promote, I began to feel more confident in using the tools and utilizing the design principles we learned in class to create an enticing flyer that adheres to copyright laws.

I chose the topic of sustainability because it is a movement that more people should be educated on, especially as a college community, and because during my public relations internship, we had managed Pittsburgh’s Earth Day, so I had already acquired a lot of information about environmentally-friendly businesses and had kept pictures from the previous event. I wanted the flyer to appeal to viewers through color, placement, and emphasis. I initially chose the image of Niagara Falls because I thought having a simple background would help readers focus more, but after showing my draft in class, many of my peers disagreed. It was recommended to me to pick a picture of the inside of Phipps Conservatory because it is a recognizable image for people who live in Pittsburgh and because it is an organization that is well-known for their environmentally-friendly business practices, so I changed the background of the flyer. I also thought it would be a beneficial picture to use because the star in the middle of it would help align the text to the center and force people to follow the information listed all the way down to the bottom of the page. After scaling the image to fit the canvas, I attempted to start writing information about the event, but I soon realized that the text wasn’t noticeable enough against the business of the background. I added in the symbol of the reduce, reuse, recycle to further help the white text stand out and to also have another representation of sustainability, which I found through Creative Commons posted on Wikipedia and uploaded by Ilmari Karonen. I debated about keeping the text white, but other colors didn’t seem to fit well with the background picture. They either looked too tacky with loud colors or they blended in with the plants. I decided on sticking with white, but I added a drop shadow for greater emphasis and contrast against the background, and I also chose a serif font to make the text easier to read.

In my previous flyer, I had placed a row of pictures of businesses, food, and museums that could be featured at panels. Blume Honey Water was a client that I worked with over the summer. They specialize in making natural energy drinks out of honey. Their brand is eco-friendly and they accent wildlife care as well, all reasons as to why they would be crucial for the Pitt Sustainability Day. I contacted my previous boss to assure that I could use their logo before posting it. I also displayed a small picture of Phipps Conservatory and Beehive Café because they both strive in helping nature and educating people about sustainable living. However, after reviewing those pictures onto my new flyer, I observed that they didn’t match with the color scheme and they looked clustered around the bottom. I deleted and replaced them with a singular image of a Blume Honey Water bottle since one of my classmates had mentioned that it would be important to keep a sustainable Pittsburgh-based product. I also added a picture of a farmer’s market, that I found on a website called Pexels through Creative Commons, to balance the organization of the picture. I adjusted both of their brightness and contrast in order to ensure that the concentration of the text in the picture would not be taken away. After examining the color, I brought down the levels of the overall background color as well, and the text was clearer to read. Finally, I decided to add two seals at the top of the flyer in order to add more color and to establish more integrity. I found a label by EKOenergy through Creative Commons, which was created by an ecolabel in Finland. They promote using electricity through renewable and resourceful methods. They originally had a white background, but it was proposed to me that I remove it, so I used the magic wand tool to make their background transparent. This removal helped to make the bright green color contrast with the darker green background. Once the front was completed, noting the clean organization and the balanced proximity of the images, I moved on to make a backside of the flyer, hoping to offer more information about businesses and restaurants that would be attending the event.

I felt that the back of the flyer should be simpler to differentiate from the complexity of the front. I placed flowers along the bottom, which I located on Pixabay, and a green border on the top to make it look organized and clean. Similar to the front, I didn’t want the colors to pop too much, so I toned down their levels so they would be closer to the appearance of a watermark. I then also chose serif text and aligned them in the center of the page trailing downward to make the line of sight of the reader follow a clear path. I kept the color of the font a dark green to stick with the color scheme as well. I think that creating a back page was effective because it would speak to the audience of college students at Pitt, since we are always trying to find delicious, healthy foods to eat and businesses that we could possibly work for in the future, and because it also pushed the genre of protecting the environment by showing that anyone could be involved in helping to create a better future. My choices in images helped me to evaluate what was important aesthetically to my flyer, and also led me to the realization that in an accessible world, not all images can be manipulated simply because they are on the web.

I found the copyright terms to be enlightening, mostly because I had never been educated about the different ones, and that even if the public is permitted to use them there are still special laws that have to be abided by when giving credit or modifying the pictures. I stuck with choosing pictures of my own or ones that were copyrighted through the Public Domain so that way I wouldn’t have to worry if I was adhering to various copyright guidelines. The EKOenergy stamp, the farmer’s market picture, and the reduce, reuse, recycle sign I found through Creative Commons. They were labeled as accessible through the Public Domain license, meaning that I could distribute and manipulate the picture without asking for permission from the owner. Of course, this project is for educational purposes, therefore, it is already sufficient for fair use, but I think it is essential to still think about copyrighted work when working with any images and text. Due to this attention to seeking permission, I also emailed my boss at my internship to request if I could use the image of the Blume Honey Water bottle in my project. While the picture is my own, the product presented is not mine, and so I wanted to be assured that I would not be threatening the ethical use of the asset. Fortunately, my boss allowed me to use the image since I would be gaining no profit from it. After researching copyright laws and using Creative Commons, I now believe that I have a better grasp as to what is acceptable when it comes to displaying features that I was originally not responsible for creating. I have never considered the significance of stealing another image because Google has no limits when it comes to offering us pictures and documents. I think that people should be informed about these rights earlier in their education and that Creative Commons should be a tool that is highlighted upon more.

The features that I used the most in GIMP were the scale, move, and text tools. Originally, I had presumed that these devices would operate the same way as they do in word, but after several trials I had to give up and turn to the tutorials for help. I came to the conclusion that layers are the most essential part of GIMP to understand because every tool centers around modifying them. A person can’t click on an image and expect it to be selected. They have to make sure that the layer is chosen first. Once I selected the correct layer, I was able to adjust the image accordingly. The move tool was simple to use, since you just dragged the layer, but I found the text and scales tools to be more complicated. The scale tool offers the option of manually putting in the height and width of an object and to change the units of measurements, though there is also the alternative of using the mouse to rearrange the size. The text tool was also similar to using a text box in word, but I didn’t think that adjust the font or its size was as easily navigational. I had to type in the style of font I wanted and I found it frustrating that I to highlight all of the text after typing it in order to change the size.

Along with these discoveries, I also struggled particularly with the lasso tool, mostly because I felt as if I couldn’t properly select an image and also because when I needed to use that feature it involved making the rest of the picture transparent, which was a difficult process for me. Even after making certain parts of the image transparent, I still had to repeat the steps multiple times in order to fully select the image that I wanted to cut around. After watching several tutorials, though, I grasped the fact that the lasso had to be drawn against the border of the object as close as possible and that the alpha channel always had to be removed in order for the rest of the image to disappear.

The design principles were also a key component that I made sure to emphasize in my project. I especially centered on organization because my visual was a flyer and I think it’s important to guide people’s attention to the time, date, and setting of an event that is occurring. I started with a heading and then trickled down with information about the essence of the event and where it would be located. All of the design elements are, of course, important to consider, but I think that organization is perhaps the best one because it forces designers to be creative, but in an effective and clear manner.

I still have a lot to learn from GIMP, but I think that the program has led me to have a greater appreciation for the work that graphic designers undertake. Even though my photo editing skills are average at best for the time being, I am proud that I produced a visual that was appealing and direct. I hope that within this next semester I will become more confident in using GIMP and my abilities will push me to attempt other design applications.

Works Cited

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